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ABSTRACT

In 1991 the School District of Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) invited elementary and middle schools to participate in a pilot project to develop and implement portfolio and performance-based assessments. Twenty-five schools began work in winter 1992. Research for Better Schools, Inc. analyzed the progress reports submitted by the schools. The progress reports provided overwhelming support for the pilot and demonstrated enthusiasm and commitment on the part of teachers. The projects marked a move from the teacher as sole evaluator to multiple sources of student evaluation. The approach to instruction began to change as teachers recognized the importance of cooperative learning, peer tutoring, and hands-on projects. School climate was positively affected by the pilot process. Parent participation was influenced by the new forms of assessment and student and parent surveys. Early resistance from some students was being overcome by teacher efforts, although parents were remaining harder to convince about the need for more authentic assessment. An appendix lists participating schools. (SLD)

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Pilot Projects in Portfolio and Performance-Based Assessment
1991 - 1992
Progress Report

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Pilot Projects in Portfolio and Performance-Based Assessment
1991 - 1992
Progress Report
Executive Summary

In September, 1991, the School District of Philadelphia invited elementary and middle schools to participate in a pilot project to develop and implement performance and portfolio assessments during the 1991-1994 time period. Through the pilots, the School District hoped to gain insight into the ways in which it could introduce performance-based assessment measures as part of its overall assessment strategy while at the same time respond to the proposed revisions in the State's curriculum regulations. The pilot projects were in keeping with the School District's commitment to restructuring and school based management.

Twenty-five schools were selected from 85 applicants and began work in the winter of 1992. Although most of the activities were school-based, the School District's Office of Accountability and Assessment and Schoolwide Projects, in collaboration with PATHS/PRISM, provided staff development, technical assistance, and opportunities for schools to meet and share problems and progress.

Research for Better Schools, Inc. (RBS) analyzed the 1991 - 1992 progress reports submitted by the pilot school teams of teachers and principals. Their reports summarized activities and lessons learned. The major findings are summarized below.

The school team progress reports provide overwhelming support for the pilot. The first year generated a lot of reflection about the process in terms of teachers working and learning together as members of a team. The exchange of ideas and contagious enthusiasm came from colleagues at their own schools as well as those from other schools involved in the pilot. Teachers also recognized the need for staff development to be ongoing.

One of the greatest changes to result was the movement from teacher as sole evaluator to multiple sources of evaluation. Teachers enlisted the assistance of students in the evaluation of their own work and that of their peers. Another major change involved the evaluation of multiple types of work -- written, drawn, constructed, audio and video taped -- completed under different learning conditions -- alone, in pairs, or in groups. Schools which experimented with portfolio assessment were generally pleased with the results, although questions or issues regarding the contents or process remained to be addressed next year.

The whole approach to instruction changed as teachers realized that the old methods of instruction (lecturing) associated with the old methods of assessment (pencil and paper tests) were no longer appropriate. Teacher as facilitator, students learning from and with each other through cooperative learning, peer tutoring, and hands-on projects became more prevalent methods of instruction and learning. Teachers also banded together to teach thematic units through a cross-curriculum or interdisciplinary approach. These methods combined to have a positive impact on student learning.

School climate was positively affected by the pilot process. In addition to teacher renewal, teachers began to understand that students were not necessarily

off-task when talking but actually learning from each other. The relationship between teacher and student also came under scrutiny. Teachers who used one-on-one conferencing discovered that the individual attention/private time builds rapport between themselves and their students.

Portfolios and other forms of performance-based assessment required teachers to design new instruments by which to measure student progress. The use of both student and parent surveys enabled teachers to form connections between home and school. Checklists and matrices were favorite tools with many teachers because of their easy application and multiple uses, allowing teachers to pinpoint both strengths and weakness of students in a particular discipline.

Some teams quickly learned that they had set overly ambitious goals and decided to narrow their focus, establishing more reasonable, attainable ones. Time was invariably the reason cited for revised goals. As always, finding time for joint planning was an issue but teachers were resourceful in meeting the extra demands. The problems of finding joint planning time will undoubtedly increase as schools seek to expand their team membership next year.

Teachers soon realized that similar assessment tools could be used across grades and disciplines. Instead of "reinventing the wheel," teachers discovered that valuable time could be saved through cross-discipline and cross-grade dialogue. The cross-school meetings aided in this process.

Early resistance was encountered from students who were initially uncomfortable with the new methods. Not only students but parents were used to thinking in terms of the "traditional A-F model" of grading. Although students generally adapted, the resistance from parents was not as easily addressed. Reeducation of parents may be needed if authentic assessment is to be successful. To address this issue, many schools were making plans for greater parental participation in the future.

Several schools planned to expand the pilot through inclusion of greater numbers of staff. In addition, some schools planned to expand the use of their strategies (e.g., thematic-based teaching and the use of journals and portfolios for each thematic unit) into different grades and different disciplines. The use of portfolio assessment was expected to be easier this year as a result of the experience gained last year.

A pressing need for developing standards and a system whereby to report them was identified. Teachers at many schools raised concerns about the need to redesign the report card or find alternate ways of recording student progress. Staff development in this area, therefore, should be a priority.

Finally, teachers were anxious to see their work continue. Several schools expressed concern, questioning "whether school districts and local, state and national governments will 'legitimize' our efforts to decrease emphasis on standardized testing and increase emphasis on performance based assessment."

Introduction

In September, 1991, the School District of Philadelphia invited elementary and middle schools to submit proposals to participate in a pilot project to develop and implement performance and portfolio assessments at the school level during the 1991-1994 time period. Through the pilots, the School District hoped to gain insight into the ways in which it could introduce performance-based assessment measures as part of its overall assessment strategy while at the same time respond to the proposed revisions in the State's curriculum regulations. The pilot projects were in keeping with the School District's commitment to restructuring and school based management.

A total of 85 proposals were received. The 25 schools that were selected initiated work in the winter of 1992. Although most of the activities were school-based, the School District's Office of Accountability and Assessment and Schoolwide Projects, in collaboration with PATHS/PRISM, provided staff development, technical assistance, and the opportunity for schools to meet and share problems and progress. The pilot schools were asked to submit progress reports.

Research for Better Schools, Inc. (RBS) agreed to assist in the analysis of progress reports submitted by the school teams participating in the pilot. This report provides a summary of activities and lessons learned by the teams of elementary and middle school teachers and principals who participated in the 1991-1992 pilot and submitted progress reports to the School District.

The first section provides feedback regarding the perceived value of the pilot process in terms of professional development of teachers. Teachers overwhelmingly praised the pilot projects for the staff development opportunity afforded them. The section summarizes the benefits of this teacher-driven staff development.

The second section looks at the assessment and instruction strategies employed and instruments developed to facilitate the change in emphasis from product to process. The section highlights the teachers' sense of the interconnectedness of the two, i.e., instruction drives assessment, which in turn drives instruction. In fact, in their summaries, teachers often discussed and described the need for, and implementation of, new methods of instruction and learning as much as they discussed and described the implementation of new methods of assessment.

The remainder of the report presents lessons learned and discusses a variety of issues and/or questions (some resolved, others not) that arose during the first year of the pilot process. It also explores the general directions in which the schools are headed during the coming year.

Professional Development

The school team summaries provide overwhelming support for the pilot. The first year generated a lot of reflection about the process in terms of teachers working and learning together as members of a team. As one elementary school teacher commented, "joining the assessment group was valuable because of new insights that were gained by working with colleagues on a mutual interest." The

comment of another elementary school teacher reflected the frustration and isolation felt by many teachers in the district: "As a Philadelphia school teacher for the past 25 years, I have been frustrated with the traditional way of assessing pupil progress. When the opportunity arose to work with my colleagues on developing other ways to assess children's abilities, I jumped at the chance to work on this committee."

Teachers described a renewal that has occurred as a result of the opportunity to "work closely with my peers, like doctors and lawyers." Their excitement was apparent as they wrote at length about "growing professionally," about the new "esprit de corps" that has developed in their schools. One principal shared their enthusiasm: "Participation in this Pilot Project had significant impact upon the climate and self-esteem of our staff. We felt good for being selected. We worked hard and accepted the responsibilities of the assignment." Teachers' comments supported those made by this principal. One elementary school teacher referred to last year as "the most exciting year of my 23 years of teaching," while another who had been involved with a thematic approach could not "wait for next year, to once again meet, continue with our unit plans, and implement our exciting ideas."

The exchange of ideas and contagious enthusiasm came from colleagues at their own schools as well as those from other schools involved in the pilot. "By meeting with my peers and colleagues and discussing such strategies as attitudinal surveys, writing folders/writing portfolios, home surveys, running records, etc., I feel that I have a more thorough understanding of a writing portfolio and its uses." Another elementary school teacher was impressed with the quality of the interactions: "When we met with colleagues from other schools and saw how they had so differently developed their projects, I was reminded of how much talent exists within the walls of our public schools." Only one teacher questioned the value of the cross-school meetings that were held, believing the time would have been better spent in meetings between their individual school team members. (This was perhaps a function of the fact that their school is spread over two sites.) More common was the sentiment expressed by an elementary school teacher: "The sharing of information was one of the most worthwhile components of this program. I am glad I was able to participate."

Teachers were delighted at the way in which other non-team members of the faculty became involved and supportive of their efforts. "We (team members) found magazine articles, items from the newspaper, pictures, etc., in our mailboxes or just handed to us by the faculty." Non-team members of the faculty even attended team meetings, encouraging team members to think about expanding the membership of their teams for next year. Some planned to form study groups with current team members heading up groups; others planned to make presentations to the entire staff at their schools.

Teachers also recognized the need for staff development to be ongoing. They acknowledged their unanswered questions and unresolved conflicts (discussed below) and looked to the experts to help them on their way. The cross-school meetings offered such expertise, e.g., a discussion by Jo Anne Eresh on "Issues in Authentic Assessment." Many school teams also brought in speakers, attended workshops and seminars on a range of topics, and listened to presentations by consultants from publishing companies regarding textbooks to use in their new approach. As one elementary teacher noted: "My instructional and assessment

skills were greatly enhanced by the knowledge I received at the many workshops, seminars and meetings on portfolio assessment." Many schools were still struggling with unresolved issues, and need help determining, for example, what the content of the portfolio should be or how old reporting systems could be revised to accommodate the new teaching and assessment methods.

Staff development also took the form of teachers as experts. Visiting the classrooms of teachers, both inside and outside of the school district, was encouraged and supported and teachers took advantage of the opportunity as they strove to learn as much as possible about authentic assessment and portfolios. Team members from one elementary school traveled to New York to observe children taught in ungraded classrooms and to learn more about their system of report cards based on comments only.

As discussed in the next section, new assessment methods necessitated new teaching methods and teachers had to learn through experimentation what worked and what did not work. Teachers, in fact, became learners, as they discovered which of these methods were successful. The result has been teachers inspired with confidence and a willingness to move forward and to expand their initial efforts.

Strategies Employed

As noted above, the goal of the pilot teams was to develop and implement performance and portfolio assessments at their schools. Teachers quickly realized, however, that instruction would have to change if assessment was to change. As a result, team members were doubly challenged and had to constantly rethink teaching practices that were no longer appropriate. This was difficult, particularly since the teaching methods were often "tried and true" (albeit recognized as no longer successful with today's students) whereas the assessment methods involved breaking new ground. Teachers rose to the challenge and experimented with new assessment and instruction strategies. Some were successful, others less so. Much was learned and teachers were anxious to reflect on, and learn from, both their successes and their failures.

Assessment Strategies and Responsibilities

One of the greatest changes to occur as a result of authentic assessment and portfolios was the movement from teacher as sole evaluator to multiple sources of evaluation. Thus teachers enlisted the assistance of students in the evaluation of their own work. "Put the ball in their court," noted an elementary school teacher who had circulated surveys to students to learn what they knew about themselves. Similarly, getting students to write journal entries on their personal expectations, their strengths and weaknesses, and their goals, both short and long term, was a strategy employed by several schools as a way of directing instruction.

The result was a change in responsibilities. Students became "participants rather than objects of assessment" as teachers came to realize that "the more the children are involved in the planning and implementation of instruction and assessment, the more the process of both become meaningful to them." Students at one elementary school were asked to evaluate their own work and "their grading in most cases matched the teacher's final marks."

Students learned to assess not only their own work but that of their peers. "I am no longer the only person in the classroom who is capable of evaluation. They learn that they too can judge the work of the others in the class. This leads to feelings of self-worth and tends to inspire them to strive towards excellence." Teachers were often impressed by their students perceptions: "She's not feeling the words" was the comment from "a thoughtful and avid reader, when comparing his reading to another child's fast reading."

Peer assessment has been used both with individual students and with groups. As one elementary school teacher noted: "When groups evaluate the presentations of other groups they not only tune in better, but they also strive as a group to do well, for they know how they will be evaluated." The use of peers in the assessment process was particularly beneficial for students with poor self-esteem when they encountered "mistakes in 'perfect' students' work." They began to understand that all students have strengths to build on and weaknesses to work on.

While self assessment was seen as a vital component of learning, so too was parental involvement. Thus parents were brought into the assessment process in several ways. Family Math enabled teachers at one middle school to educate parents about alternative forms of assessment. Elementary school parents were sent surveys and given the opportunity to select a piece of student work to put in his/her portfolio. The parent-teacher conference was used as a vehicle for educating parents in ways to improve their child's self-esteem.

Another major change involved the evaluation of multiple types of work -- written, drawn, constructed, audio and video taped -- completed under different learning conditions -- alone, in pairs, or in groups. "Activities such as drawing, writing, poetry, dioramas, etc., induce a greater desire to participate and therefore master the subject matter," noted one elementary school teacher. The progress report from another elementary school was illustrative of the variety of assessment strategies employed by many schools, i.e., teacher checklists, recorded teacher observations, student self analysis and collaboration with the teacher, student learning logs, student journals, concept mapping, creative research reports, collages, drawings and illustrations, and student interviews. Much of this work was collected in student portfolios, with work to be included selected by students, parents and teachers. Students were also expected to reflect upon the selection decision itself, i.e., why was a piece of work chosen?

Schools which experimented with portfolio assessment were generally pleased with the results, although questions or issues regarding the contents ("no right way or list to follow,") or process ("fluid, not carved in stone...trial and error,") remained to be addressed next year. "Shared success and 'near misses' have helped us all prepare for more effective use of portfolios next year," was the comment from one elementary school teacher. Schools fell along a continuum of progress regarding their work with portfolios. At one elementary school, the portfolio consisted of a list of activities, some of which are mandated, others represent a choice for the student. At another, a teacher reported: "I have taken our 7th and 8th grade students through the transitional process of using a writing folder to creating a portfolio. Each student has designed a personalized folder and selected his or her special pieces of writing to be included in his or her portfolio. These writings represent writing across the

curriculum." At a third, however, they were still holding discussions to determine what the content of the portfolio should be.

Teacher satisfaction with portfolios was expressed in many ways. "Reading the portfolios gave me a well-needed shot in the arm" noted an elementary school teacher who found portfolios instructional for teachers and inspirational for students, encouraging students to work harder. The team report from another elementary school viewed portfolios as "an excellent tool in showing pupil progress." Finally, teachers at a third elementary school were thrilled by one outcome of their new portfolio assessment: "As a result of Donte's writing portfolio work, Mrs. Given became convinced that he was talented. She followed through and Donte was tested for possible MG placement. He passed with flying colors! He will begin attending MG classes in September" (Writing Portfolio Assessment Newsletter, 1992).

An important use of the portfolios beyond grade assessment was noted by teachers from several schools. The ability to pass them on at the end of the year to the next teacher was viewed as invaluable to the preparation of that teacher as well as continuity for the student.

Instruction

The whole approach to instruction changed as teachers realized that the old methods of instruction (lecturing) associated with the old methods of assessment (pencil and paper tests) were no longer appropriate. Teacher as facilitator, students learning from and with each other through cooperative learning, peer tutoring, and hands-on projects were the methods of instruction and learning increasingly found in classrooms last year.

The use of hands-on learning through projects produced encouraging results. As two elementary school teachers noted, cooking made "language come to life," and a community oral history and mural project was "alternative assessment at its best." As alternative assessment forced teachers to abandon traditional forms of instruction, the result was creative and interesting learning experiences for students.

School climate was positively affected by the pilot process. In addition to the renewed spirit of teachers, noted above, "the sounds of my classroom changed," was the comment from an elementary school teacher. Teachers began to understand that noise in the classroom could be positive, that students were not necessarily off-task when talking but actually learning from each other.

The relationship between teacher and student also came under scrutiny. Teachers who used one-on-one conferencing discovered that the individual attention/private time builds rapport between themselves and their students. Whether used in reading, writing or math, encouraging students to talk through a problem or explain the process used to arrive at an answer led to a greater understanding of students' needs and abilities. The process involved student reflection and was a useful teaching tool in and of itself.

Reflection was also an integral part of retelling, an "accurate tool for measuring student recall and student's use of language" increasingly used throughout the schools as an alternative teaching/assessment method. Conversely, one elementary school teacher noted: "Students who are not verbal

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in class I got to know through their writing," an example of how different assessment methods were required to produce similar information.

Teachers also banded together to teach thematic units through a cross-curriculum or interdisciplinary approach. For example, teachers at a special admission school joined together to present science/math and science/English units while teachers of math and social studies at a middle school joined forces to teach a thematic unit, with student work at the latter assessed through a variety of measures, e.g., journals, folders, oral presentations, and final math and social science tests. The value of this approach was noted by an elementary school teacher: "Learning a little 'real stuff' is better than 'covering the curriculum' where little information is retained." Theme teaching and other assessment methods (non paper/pencil tests) combined to have a positive impact on student learning, giving the teacher "greater insights into the capabilities of the individual child and it also gave the child a chance to succeed through alternative means."

Instruments Developed

Portfolios and other forms of performance-based assessment required teachers to design new instruments by which to measure student progress. Some of the most commonly used instruments included the survey (parent and student), the checklist and the matrix. Each one is discussed below.

The need to learn more about students' attitudes towards reading was the motivation behind the implementation of the ERAS (Elementary Reading Attitude Survey) at one elementary school. The use of this survey enabled teachers to form connections between home and school reading, discussed below. These connections were strengthened by surveys to parents, as well as reading logs for the home which led to the generation of a list of favorite books for students to draw upon. Other types of surveys developed included the Student Writing Survey, developed and field tested by one of the middle schools, and the beginning and end-of-year surveys, self-evaluation surveys, and a parents' survey which will be introduced at one of the elementary schools next year.

Checklists and matrices were favorite tools with many teachers because of their easy application and multiple uses. As one elementary school teacher noted: "Checklists are critical to the clarity of anecdotal records...force us to set down what we think is important for our students to learn...also used to analyze journal entries...provides invaluable information to parents as supplement to the report card." Checklists were used extensively by teachers of ESOL students at one elementary school. Checklists were generated by both students and teachers; commercially produced checklists also were used.

An extension of the checklist, the matrix was used by many schools to pinpoint strengths and weakness of students in a particular discipline. At one elementary school, for example, the reading/literature matrix was simply a checklist of reading skills, while the Basic Skills Inventory designed by math teachers at a middle school (to be administered five times a year) will track student progress throughout the year and provide information for a checklist of skills. One of the teachers at this middle school believed that "many items used in math are already performance based as long as you expect students to do the work and show how they got the answer." Finally, teachers at an elementary school developed a Language Arts Matrix ("a fine assessment tool") that can be

attached to a student's report card during parent conferences (scheduled twice a year) thereby providing the parent with information regarding both skills learned and assessment techniques used.

Lessons Learned and Implications for Year Two

In the progress reports, teachers were highly reflective about the problems encountered along the way. One elementary school teacher talked about the pilot as a "springboard for reflective thinking." Some teams quickly learned that they had been over-ambitious in the goals they had set for themselves in their proposals and decided to narrow their focus, establishing more reasonable, attainable ones. Time was invariably the reason cited for revised goals. As the team from one middle school noted, "we soon learned that the goals we set for year one of this project were ambitious and indeed impossible to fulfill... We have learned the hard way that starting small is the best way." Similarly, an elementary school teacher commented on the importance of "small increments so as not to overwhelm anyone. Tackling too many areas tends to spread one too thin." Finally, one elementary school team had planned separate reading and writing portfolios but discussion led the team to move forward with portfolios in only one of these areas initially.

Variety and Versatility of Assessment Tools

Once an assessment strategy was developed for one grade or discipline, however, teachers realized that similar assessment tools can be used across grades and disciplines. For example, at one elementary school, learning logs, journals, checklists, and portfolios were used by first grade whole language teams and fifth grade math teams. Instead of "reinventing the wheel," teachers discovered that valuable time can be saved through cross-discipline and cross-grade dialogue. Once again, the cross-school meetings aided in this process.

Each school presented a laundry list of assessment methods already implemented or in the planning stages for the second year of the pilot. The "permutations and combinations" of methods that have been or will be tried were endless. Each school, and within a school, each teacher implemented and will continue to select those assessment methods which they consider to be best for their students and themselves. The variety of learning and teaching styles dictates flexibility with the whole premise behind alternative and performance assessment based on the idea that individuals have different strengths. In order to tap these, a broad assortment of opportunities must be available.

Time Constraints

Teachers generally agreed that while alternative assessment "required a lot of effort, I feel as though it was time well spent." As always, finding time for joint planning was an issue but teachers were resourceful in meeting the extra demands. Team members at one elementary school, for example, scheduled weekly meetings at 7:45 a.m. to give themselves the necessary time to work together. The problems of finding joint planning time will undoubtedly increase as schools seek to expand their team membership next year.

Anecdotal recording, learning logs, and dialogue journals were three strategies that were criticized for the amount of time required to implement

them. As a result, one school took anecdotal recording off its list of assessment strategies to implement next year. One elementary school teacher wrote about the "inability to find a way to jot down observations about students during class time and to have discussions that were longer than two or three minutes with individual students about their writing," while another teacher at the same school reflected, "I think there are things I could have done better. I did not employ learning logs as much as I would have liked because I never seemed to have the time." Finally, one elementary school teacher complained that dialogue journals led to "no life" for the teacher required to read them. He solved the problem by implementing "peer dialogue journals and dialectical journals." Many teachers appeared to be operating under the adage, "If you're marking everything your students write, they are not writing enough" as they struggled to cope with the increase in demands on their time imposed by the implementation of alternative or performance based assessment strategies.

Another common reaction to the time issue was the one which referred to the pilot process as "slow, messy, yet fruitful." Teachers recognized that things would not change overnight. Resistance had to be countered on all fronts as teachers, students and parents alike were confronted with new methods of both assessment and instruction. For example, many teachers were comfortable with the more objective, traditional methods and were in some cases threatened by the implementation of new assessment methods which might be used to question their own judgement.

Early resistance was encountered from students who were initially uncomfortable with the new methods, particularly if the old methods had proven successful for them in the past. The attempt to assess students' reading comprehension through response logs, for example, was not successful with one elementary school teacher. Students were fearful of writing and preferred to verbalize their responses. However, students adapted and generally "enjoyed the different assessments and were willing participants when asked to engage in different methods of assessing, including self-assessment."

Parental Participation

The resistance from parents was not as easily addressed. Reeducation of parents may be needed if authentic assessment is to be successful. Not only students but parents were used to thinking in terms of the "traditional A-F model" of grading and this thinking needs to be changed. To address this issue, many schools were making plans to bring about greater parental participation in the future. As noted above, teachers at one elementary school plan to use the parent-teacher conference to educate parents in ways to improve their children's self esteem. Parent participation in the alternative assessment process has already begun at another elementary school where parents welcomed homework assignments and a discussion among teachers about the parent survey resulted when parents added their own questions to the instrument. Several schools will continue to get parent input from surveys and in the selection of work to be included in their child's portfolio.

Instruction Drives Assessment Which Drives Instruction

A recurring theme throughout the summaries was the interconnectedness of instruction and assessment and the realization that, with new methods of assessment must come new methods of instruction. As alternative assessment

strategies produced a much broader picture of students and their individual needs and learning styles, different methods of instruction had to be found to address these differences. "Teaching strategies must evolve from their (students) needs," noted an elementary school teacher. Teachers thus saw themselves as students: "We are now the learners, learning with and through our students." The result was a shift of emphasis from product to process.

It was not only information on skills and aptitudes that were tapped but also student attitudes towards reading as teachers attempted to uncover the underlying source of behavior that manifests itself into readers and non-readers. Issues of self-esteem and home environment were examined through student and parent surveys to determine whether reading was "enforced" (resulting in negative associations e.g., when a student is required to read to a sibling) rather than "encouraged." Information from such surveys led teachers to adjust the reading environments at school to more closely match the reading environments of their students' homes (e.g., where reading takes place on a couch rather than at a desk).

Project Expansion

As noted above, several schools planned to expand the pilot through inclusion of greater numbers of staff. Teachers were anxious to "spread our enthusiasm and share our knowledge" and to "present the idea of alternative assessment portfolios to the entire faculty" next year. In addition, some schools planned to expand the use of their strategies into different grades and different disciplines. A special admission school, for example, planned to develop similar alternative assessment "learning packets" for 10th graders this year, building on their successful experience with upper grades last year that led to the graduation of five seniors and one junior. An elementary school, as noted above, planned to expand the use of the essay as an assessment tool in reading to other subject areas.

Other strategies targeted for expansion of use were thematic-based teaching and the use of journals and portfolios for each thematic unit. The use of portfolio assessment was expected to be easier this year as a result of the experience gained last year. One elementary school planned to design a portfolio with the help of parents and teachers. At another, encouraged by the literature that supported their emphasis on evaluation rather than tests, teachers will build on their success with the essay as an assessment tool in reading ("Essays allow children to shine"), and expand the practice to other subject areas to be determined by the team. The list goes on. "Next year I'll make time to employ learning logs," noted one elementary school teacher, while another elementary school teacher who felt anecdotal records were invaluable for students, parents, and teachers declared, "I will use them much more in the coming year." One elementary school team noted that their "major thrust for 1992-1993 will be to set standards for student performance."

Standards and Reporting System

The previous comment brings to the fore the pressing need for developing standards and a system whereby to report them. Teachers at many schools raised concerns about the need to redesign the report card or find alternate ways of recording student progress. Staff development in this area, therefore, should be a priority. As one elementary school teacher commented, since "we will still

be responsible for grading our students in the traditional manner, I would like to see us establish a portfolio that is easy but can be used as a transition to the alternative assessment of the future." Passing portfolios to the student's next grade teacher was seen as one way of informing teachers and establishing continuity for students.

A middle school teacher also talked about informing teachers and establishing continuity from the receiving teacher/student perspective. As a result of collecting writing samples from students in its feeder schools, the "need for dialogue" was established.

Finally, teachers were anxious to see their work continue. Several schools expressed concern, questioning "whether school districts and local, state and national governments will 'legitimize' our efforts to decrease emphasis on standardized testing and increase emphasis on performance based assessment," and "now how do we sell the state."

"Bottom Line"

If success is measured in terms of positive feedback from teachers, the first year of the pilot projects in portfolio and performance-based assessment was a resounding success. Three final comments from teachers participating in the pilot best summarize the general sentiments of the group regarding the new teaching and assessment strategies employed over the first year. One elementary school teacher noted, "The newer methods of teaching and assessment have been positive for me and my students. These tools can help teachers better educate their students and that's the bottom line of what we are aiming for." Another teacher was pleased with the success she observed: "Over all, the activities had a high success rate. The students seemed to remember, understand, and enjoy what we were learning about more." Both echoing and elaborating on the impact of the pilot was the testimony of a third elementary school teacher, worth quoting at length:

> Since I have changed my way of teaching, I have witnessed a miracle taking place in my classroom. The children are excited about coming to school and learning. They are eager to share information with me and their classmates. No longer am I the only teacher in the classroom. The children are learning to take charge of their learning. I see them talking with each other, sharing books, consulting charts and displays, and helping each other to write. My classroom is now alive with meaningful noise and lots of activity. It has been a joy to witness, and I am appreciative to have had this opportunity.

APPENDIX

Alternative Assessment Pilot Schools

ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT PILOT SCHOOLS

AMY 6 Middle School
Belmont Elementary School
Boone Special Admission School
Cooke Middle School
Cramp Elementary School
Emlen Elementary School
F. Douglass Elementary School
Feltonville Elementary School
Gillespie Middle School
Hanna Elementary School
Harrington Elementary School
Henry Elementary School
Levering Elementary School
Lingelbach Elementary School
McDaniel Elementary School
Marshall Elementary School
M.S. Stanton Elementary School
Powel Elementary School
Shawmont Elementary School
Southwark Elementary School
Sulzberger Middle School
Vare Middle School
W.D. Kelly Elementary School
Wagner Middle School
Willard Elementary School